Issues of Human Resource Management of Japanese Subsidiaries in the U.S.: The Effect of Personal-Demographic Aspects of American Employees on Commitment to Japanese Subsidiaries

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1. Issues and Research Questions

Since the second half of the 1980s, the strong Japanese yen over to U.S. dollar has enabled Japanese companies to embark on the greenfield venture on the U.S. soil. Even small- and medium-sized Japanese companies have built their plants as the greenfield venture in the U.S. However, the greenfield venture has created a number of issues of human resource management stemming from the cross-cultural settings that Japanese managers had never experienced in Japan. One of the issues of the human resource management is the way locally hired American employees commit themselves to and stay in their employing organizations when working for Japanese subsidiaries. This study was inspired by a question which was often raised by many Japanese expatriate managers working for Japanese subsidiaries in the U.S.: To what extent can we (Japanese subsidiaries) expect the Japanese type of organizational commitment and retention of American employees in our U.S. plants? The Japanese expatriate managers have noticed that four personal-demographic aspects (age, education, tenure/years of service, and rank) are not necessarily associated with positive aspects of organizational commitment and that better educated American employees tend to leave Japanese subsidiaries for better opportunities outside Japanese subsidiaries than high-school educated American employees. Although much has been talked about the duplication of the Japanese-style management in the U.S.(e. g., Beechler and Yang, 1994; Bird, Taylor, and Beechler, 1998), little has been known about the association of the four personal-demographic aspects in conjunction with the organizational commitment and the retention of American employees working for Japanese subsidiaries in the U.S.

As for the effect of personal-demographic variables on organizational commitment, some studies have shared the results that personal-demographic variables have less significant influence on organizational commitment than other dimensions (e.g., Steers, 1977; Angle and Perry, 1981; Bateman and Strasser, 1984). DeCotiis and Summers have

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summarized as follows: "The relationships between various personal characteristics and measures of organizational commitment have probably been more widely studied, and with consistently unimpressive results . . . than any other category of commitment-related variables"(1987:449). The following aspects have been found: positive commitment is positively related to 'age'(Steers, 1977; Morris and Sherman, 1981; Angle and Perry, 1981) and 'tenure'(Buchanan, 1974; Mowday, Steers, and Porter, 1979), whereas it is negatively related to 'education level'(Koch and Steers, 1978; Angle and Perry, 1981; Morris and Sherman, 1981). In a comparative study of the organizational commitment of American workers with their Japanese counterparts, Near (1989) has found that for U.S. workers, marital status (being married) and gender of respondent (being female) are positively related to positive commitment; for Japanese respondents, age is associated with positive commitment. In short, it seems that personal-demographic variables vary from one to another in terms of their effect on organizational commitment when American samples were studied.

This study examines the following three research questions. (1) Whether or not four personal-demographic variables (age, education, tenure/years of service, and rank) are positively associated with organizational commitment, which is often pointed out as a Japanese pattern with regard to the effect of personal-demographic aspects on organizational commitment. (2) Whether or not there is a difference between the two genders in terms of organizational commitment. (3) Whether or not the five personal-demographic variables (age, education, tenure/years of service, rank, and gender) are positively associated with staying in Japanese subsidiaries (an alternative choice of organizations, either Japanese subsidiaries or U.S companies).

The first research question is designed to find answers to the question raised by Japanese expatriate managers. Coupled with the structural features of Japanese companies, several employment and personnel practices were found to foster organizational commitment among their employees. Among the employment and personnel practices were (1) recruitment of new employees immediately after graduation from school, (2) slow promotion on the basis of seniority, and (3) life-long or continuing employment. These particular employment practices were kept by larger companies. Larger Japanese companies in Japan had kept these practices alive, as long as situations permitted, although these practices have been challenged by the sluggish conditions of the Japanese economy of this decade. These practices fostered particular kinds of organizational commitment among the employees of larger Japanese companies: 'the longer in tenure, the higher in position, and the stronger the organizational commitment', or 'the higher in education, the higher in rank (status) and the stronger the organizational commitment'(Marsh and Mannari, 1971). To what extent do American employees fall into these kinds of organizational commitment when they work for Japanese subsidiaries? Since Japanese

subsidiaries in the United States are forced to modify all of the employment and personnel practices, different patterns are predicted to emerge.

One special reason underlies the attempt to examine the second research question: the effect of gender difference on organizational commitment. 'Gender discrimination' is synonymous with Japanese organizations, whether they are public or private organizations. Several studies (e.g., Young, 1984) have shed light on the gender discrimination (i.e., using female labor force as disposable to adjust labor cost) as one of the fundamental conditions prerequisite for Japanese economic success. While it is said that Japanese subsidiaries in the United States are not formally allowed to implement gender discrimination in any sense, it is worth testing the effect of gender difference on organizational commitment. Particularly because Near (1989) has reported that being female is positively related to positive commitment among American females, it can be heuristically important to examine the effect of gender difference in a cross-cultural setting for future study.

The third research question is designed to find answers not only to the question of Japanese expatriate managers but also to an anthropological concern with the crossroad of the two business cultures: Japanese and American business cultures. That is, how American employees count their opportunity cost (the loss in alternative value resulting from using some means, or the sacrifice of doing something else) which they must pay for staying in Japanese subsidiaries. Of the two choices shaped by two different cultures, choosing one thing (e.g., less functionally specialized career paths within an organization) may require American employees to sacrifice choosing another (e.g., pursuing their professional careers across organizations). However, in any type of economy or any mode of production, people must sacrifice something to obtain something else (Dalton, 1974). Since culture influences people's decision about the choice, the extent to which American employees agree with staying in Japanese subsidiaries may indicate where the differences between the two cultures exist. On many occasions, the way a foreign-owned corporation and its local employees react to one another depends on what kinds of cultural differences exist between the parties with regard to the expectations the employees hold concerning their organizational life, as suggested in several studies (e.g., Lincoln, Olson, and Hanada, 1978). To date, no anthropological attempts have been made to investigate how the cultural interface settings affect the relationship between the five personal-demographic variables and American employees' alternative choice of organizations (staying in Japanese subsidiaries).

2. Methods

Definitions and Operationalization of Concepts

O'Reilly and Chatman (1986) defined the three identifiable types of commitment as

follows: (1) 'compliance', which occurs when attitudes and behaviors are adopted not because of shared beliefs but simply to gain specific rewards; (2) 'identification', which occurs when an individual accepts influence to establish or maintain a satisfying relationship; an individual may feel proud to be a part of a group, respecting its values and accomplishments without adopting them as his or her own; (3) 'internalization' which occurs when influence is accepted because the induced attitudes and behaviors are congruent with one's values; the values of the individual and the group or organization are one and the same. In short, organizational commitment ranged from compliance through identification with a company to internalization of a company's values. Compliance was considered to be a negative form of organizational commitment or to be an instrumental commitment, whereas identification with a company and internalization of a company's values were considered to be positive forms of organizational commitment. It was assumed that the more an employee commits himself or herself to his or her organization, the more the employee internalizes the values of the organization. The following statements were selectively taken from two studies of organizational commitment and were modified somewhat (Mowday et al., 1982; O'Reilly and Chatman, 1986). Internalization of A Company's Values: (1) I find that my values and this organization's values are very similar; and (2) The reason I prefer this organization to others is because of what it stands for, its values. Identification with A Company: (1) I speak well of this organization to my friends as a great organization to work for; and (2) I am proud to tell others that I am part of this organization. Compliance or Instrumental Motivation: (1) The main reason why I work for this company is for monetary gain; and (2) I see no reason to spend extra efforts on behalf of this company unless I am monetarily rewarded. Besides these statements, another statement was used to measure American employee's alternative choice of organizations (staying in Japanese subsidiaries: I prefer working for a Japanese company rather than an American company.

These statements above were randomly ordered on the questionnaire form. Except for a single-item measure, my measure of the variables was a composite index calculated by averaging the summed responses to 7-point Likert scale statements underlying each of the concepts. Each statement was evaluated on the seven choices ranging from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'. Participants were asked to indicate the degree to which they agree or disagree with each statement.

Research Sites and Sample Subsidiaries

Japanese subsidiaries were defined as firms in which their Japanese parent companies have 100% ownership. The sample companies were recruited from Japanese subsidiaries located in four southeast states (Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, and Alabama). Except for several large plants (e.g., Toyota of Kentucky, Nissan of Tennessee, YKK of

Georgia), the majority of Japanese subsidiaries in the Sunbelt fell in the group of medium or small subsidiaries which employ fewer than 300 workers.

My initial contact with the Japanese subsidiaries was made either by a telephone call or by mailing a letter addressed to the Japanese president of the subsidiaries. Usually, the personnel of Japanese subsidiaries allowed me to talk to their Japanese presidents, Japanese vice presidents or their immediate Japanese subordinates who were capable of understanding the goals of this study. Forty-two Japanese subsidiaries agreed to participate in this study.

Data Collection Procedures

Once the subsidiaries agreed to this study, a package containing eight questionnaire forms was mailed to Japanese personnel who were able to assist my research. The Japanese personnel were instructed to follow the following procedures. (1) Inform American employees that their participation in this study is voluntary; this point was clarified by a cover letter attached to the questionnaire form confirming that participation was voluntary. (2) Distribute questionnaire forms to randomly chosen American employees in the four levels of organizational hierarchy: top manager, middle manager, foreman or first level supervisor, and entry-level worker. (3) Instruct American employees to take the questionnaire forms to their homes, complete them in privacy and return them directly to me by a pre-paid self-addressed envelope. These points were confirmed in the cover letter. These procedures were executed from March 1991 to February 1992. An additional data collection was also executed in 1994 and 1995 to make up the partial shortage of observations that was created during the early effort for data collection.

Participants

One hundred twenty-three usable replies were returned (the return rate was about 38%). Eighty-four were from males and thirty-nine from females. The means and standard deviations of personal-demographic variables were shown in Table 1. Education, age, and tenure/years of service were measured in years. The rank of organizational hierarchy was measured in the following 7-rank hierarchy (for the statistical computation, the following numbers inside parentheses were assigned to each of the seven ranks in the process of coding data): (1) entry level worker; (2) foreman or first-level supervisor; (3) section chief or staff specialist; (4) assistant department head; (5) department head; (6) assistant plant manager; and (7) plant manager or distinguished head. The mean of the rank of respondents was 3.6 (standard deviation = 1.75), indicating that the questionnaire forms were evenly distributed from top management to entry level worker.

Construction of Indices

Because my measure of some constructs was a composite index calculated by averaging the summed responses to the 7-point scale statements, a variance test (F_{max} test) was executed on each of the indices. Each of the indices was found to meet the assumption that the items to be summed into an index must have near-equal variance, enabling the present study to use each of these indices for further analysis. Once the assumption of the near-equal variance test was met, the internal reliability (Cronbach's alpha) for each of the indices was computed. The following internal reliability for each of the indices was obtained: Internalization of A Company's Values = .82, Identification with A Company = .90, and Compliance = .31.

It should be noted that the two items supposedly underlying compliance failed to achieve acceptable internal reliability. The low correlation (r=.19) between the two items ruined the index construction. Although these two items might underlie part of compliance, they should be used as mutually independent variables as follows: compliance 1 (working for monetary gain) and compliance 2 (no reward, no effort).

Table 1 presented the means, standard deviations, correlations, and internal reliabilities of these indices. Although Table 1 did not show data about gender, the following numbers were assigned to two genders: 0 for female and 1 for male for statistical computation of the data analysis.

Table 1

The Means and Standard Deviations for Personal-Demographic Variables & Indices and the Zero-order Correlation among Them (n=123)

	Means	St.dv	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Education	16.3	2.23	—								
2. Age	37.5	8.40	.18	—							
3. Tenure/years of service	4.1	2.93	.09	.17	—						
4. Rank	3.6	1.75	.68	.31	.35	—					
5. Internalization of a company's values	0.61	1.64	-.01	.23	.24	.23	(.82)				
6. Identification with a company	1.37	1.71	-.04	.12	.20	.18	.74	(.90)			
7. Working for monetary gain	-0.19	1.91	.20	-.02	-.02	-.31	-.26	-.23	—		
8. No reward, no effort	-1.24	1.98	.21	.20	-.19	-.08	-.41	-.50	.19	—	
9. Alternative choice of organizations	-0.09	1.71	-.39	-.14	.08	-.10	.46	.39	.05	.48	—

Internal reliability estimates are shown on the diagonal (omitting estimate for one-item measure). The mean of the variables of the commitment and the alternative choice of organizations (staying in Japanese subsidiaries) is 0.00 because the following numerical values were assigned to a seven-choice statement:-3 for strongly disagree, -2 for moderately disagree, -1 for slightly agree, 0 for neither disagree nor agree, +1 for slightly agree, +2 for moderately agree, and +3 for strongly agree.

3. Results of Analysis

A multiple regression analysis was executed in each of the five dependent variables to examine the three research questions, although this study did not propose particular hypotheses. Table 2 reported the results of the five multiple regression analyses at the .05 level of significance. The following aspects were detected, although the R-squares of the five models were not impressive as predicted.

Table 2

Multiple Regression Estimates for the Effect of Personal-Demographic Variables on Organizational Commitment and Alternative Choice of Organizations (n=123)

	Independent Variables						
	Standardized Regression Coefficients (Standard error)						
Dependent Variables	Education	Age	Tenure	Rank	Gender	F-value	R-square Adjusted R-square
Internalization of a company's values	-.239 (.122)	.142 (.104)	.091 (.155)	.349*** (.097)	-.018 (.137)	2.91**	.132 .110
Identification with a company	-.128 (.141)	.052 (.125)	.142 (.149)	.204 (.167)	-.130 (.139)	1.67	.089 .064
Working for monetary gain	.345*** (.109)	.119 (.144)	.137 (.183)	-.512*** (.110)	.072 (.118)	3.09***	.163 .147
No reward, no effort	.315*** (.099)	.282* (.102)	-.074 (.136)	-.281 (.144)	-.227 (.153)	3.12***	.170 .149
Alternative choice of organizations	.278* (.097)	.021 (.168)	.102 (.179)	-.103 (.098)	.096 (.142)	2.23**	.125 .101

* p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

The First Research Question

(1) Internalization of A Company's Values. Out of the five personal-demographic variables, one (rank) was found to be statistically significant (.349, p<.001). The positive slope of this variable suggested that the higher rank participants tended to internalize their companies' values.

(2) Identification with A Company. None of the five demographic variables were found to be statistically significant.

(3) Working for Monetary Gain. Out of the five personal-demographic variables, two

were found to be statistically significant (.345, p<.001 for education, and -.512, p<.001 for rank). This contrast between education and rank was striking. The positive slope of education suggested that the participants equipped with higher academic degrees were more motivated to work for monetary gain, whereas the negative slope of rank suggested that the higher rank participants were less motivated to work for monetary gain.

(4) No Reward No Effort. Out of the five personal-demographic variables, two were found to be statistically significant (.282, p<.05 for age, and .315, p<.001 for education). The positive slopes of these two variables suggested that the older participants equipped with higher academic degrees tended not to make effort without monetary reward.

The Second Research Question

None of the five models were found to have statistically significant difference between the two genders in terms of the effect of gender difference on the three forms of organizational commitment.

The Third Research Question

Alternative Choice of Organizations, Either Japanese Subsidiaries or American Companies. Out of the five personal-demographic variables, one (education) was found to be statistically significant (.278, p<.05). The positive slope of this variable suggested that the participants equipped with higher academic degrees tended to prefer leaving Japanese subsidiaries if they would be given an alternative choice of American companies.

4. Discussions

Some methodological shortcomings of this study (i.e., small sample size, low return rate of questionnaire forms, reliance on some single-item indices, and so on) requires this study to be conservative in interpreting the results of data analysis. Nevertheless, the results of these regression analyses suggest the following aspects.

(1) As predicted, the personal-demographic variables vary from one to another in terms of the effect on organizational commitment. While 'education' is positively correlated with 'rank' (r=.68), the effect of both variables on organizational commitment goes in the opposite direction: 'rank' is positively associated with the positive commitment, whereas 'education' is negatively associated with the positive commitment. The finding of the effect of education is consistent with the finding of previous studies regarding Americans (e.g., Koch and Steers, 1978; Angle and Perry, 1981; Morris and Sherman, 1981). In other words, the Japanese assumption (the all positive correlation among the higher level of education, the higher rank, and the higher positive organizational commitment) does not always occur to American employees working for Japanese subsidiaries in the United

States of America.

(2) While this study did not find an effect of gender difference on organizational commitment, the small number of observations of both genders could not warrant this study to rule out the possibility of the effect of gender difference. It would be sanguine to conclude that Japanese subsidiaries did not differentiate in their treatment of both genders. Thus, it would be unwise to rule out the possibility that the organizational commitment of American employees differs by gender. Future study may have to address this issue to test the hypothesis of gender difference.

(3) American employees equipped with higher academic degrees tend to pursue other opportunities outside Japanese subsidiaries, when they are given such opportunities. This means that they may be reluctant to pay 'opportunity cost'(i.e., the sacrifice of doing something else), when opportunities for getting better are available in the external market outside Japanese subsidiaries. In other words, they are working for Japanese subsidiaries 'with reservation'. This tendency might be amplified by the small- and medium-sized subsidiaries as samples used in this study. The American employees might not see bright career development in the small- and medium-sized Japanese subsidiaries.

This finding is consistent with the following remarks that were expressed by two Japanese expatriate managers during my field interview regarding turnovers of highly educated American employees. To summarize their remarks, "We (Japanese subsidiary) had patiently expended our time and money to let him learn our system for these years and promoted him from assistant department head to department head. Right after he was promoted, he quit our company to take a better position of an American company. He reasoned that the promotion resulting from his learning of our system would make him better qualified in seeking better opportunities somewhere else. He viewed working for Japanese subsidiaries as one step to move up in his career ladder in labor market. His commitment to the so-called 'professionalism' seems to outweigh loyalty to our company. This would rarely happen in Japan." The results of the data analysis suggest that for some American employees, the benefits accruing from pursuing professionalism outside Japanese subsidiaries can outweigh 'opportunity cost' which they must pay for staying in Japanese subsidiaries. Conceivably, the level of education is a weak surrogate for the commitment to professionalism, or a negative stance toward sacrificing opportunities outside Japanese subsidiaries. From the view of the Japanese side, the higher academic degrees of American employees may be considered as 'a leak in the system', so to speak. However, the tendencies shown by highly educated American employees may be considered 'cultural' in the sense that they may be committed to their professions.

This cultural trait of highly educated American employees further suggests something for anthropology. For many years, anthropologists have suggested the 'embeddedness' of an economy (e.g., Malinowski, 1922; Dalton, 1961). The embeddedness has not

necessarily prevented Japanese companies from expanding their operation overseas. Thus, some Japanese have claimed that there are no barriers to capital being invested beyond national borders and across cultures (e.g., Ohmae, 1985). However, it would be naive to assume that people are as culture-neutral as monetary capital and that a particular type of organizational commitment proven reliable in a culture can work in another culture. Rather, when investment is made across cultures, careful attention should be paid to the interface between cultures and their impact on the behaviors of locally hired people. Because culture guides people in certain behaviors and people are culturally malleable, such borders between cultures, coupled with the embeddedness of economy, may impede both multinational corporations and their locally hired employees from becoming integrated across cultures. Although it would not be impossible for multinational corporations to integrate their locally hired employees (e.g., Tanno, 1999), it would be too sanguine to assume that there was no impediment against integration between multinational corporations and their locally hired employees.

The growing internationalization of business has required not only management researchers (e.g., England, 1983; Ferraro, 1990; Florida and Kenny, 1991) but also anthropologists to address the cultural issues resulting from the cultural interface situations. The issues have actually provided anthropology with new domains of investigation (e.g., Baba, 1980; Briody and Baba, 1991; Holzberg and Giovannini, 1981). The interface between cultures is, in a sense, incognita to be explored by cultural anthropology. The terra incognita may be a gold mine into which "business anthropology" has wandered. To explore it, business anthropology is expected to cross-fertilize itself with other disciplines (e.g., Walck, 1989) and thus become more applicable to the modern world. In doing so, business anthropology may have to bear an often-raised criticism cast to social science: "it documents the obvious" (Myers, 1999, 15). Nonetheless business anthropology can facilitate the service of cultural anthropology as an instrument not for colonization of people but for the optimization of happiness of people working in the cultural interface settings.

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